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AN EXCLUSIVE INSIDE INTERVIEW ON THE CLASH OF THE TITANS!

BONUS SCOOP! SCREENWRITER WESLEY STRICK OF CAPE FEAR & ARACHNOPHOBIA SPILLS SECRETS BEHIND THE STORY OF BATMAN RETURNS!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

#111

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UP FRONT

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Have you heard that stuff about storing the pent-up negative emotions in the liver, which "dumps" the accumulated winter junk when the diet and weather starts to change in spring? It jibes with what is also taught in Yoga, at least according to my teacher. (Now I open today's paper to find that, yes, I'm just a statistic, and that the "boomers" are now into Yoga as the current trend; how does this happen, one wonders? After all, what's really weird is that I was sorting through old files one day and found a note in my own handwriting that has to date back at least six or seven years, listing Hatha Yoga as one of my goals!)

Anyway, on her recommendation I got a CD by **Patrick Bernhardt** titled SOLARIS UNIVERSALIS, which combines Indian, American Indian, and other music in a New Age fashion with each track designated to help meditate and relax or stimulate specific organs and/or parts of the body, which in turn are believed to reduce stress stored in those organs and areas. I must say, when I first heard this I kept my mouth shut, but in charitable terms my thoughts ran something like this: Bullshit.

However, given how much of our physical sense of well being is affected by diet, lack of certain nutrients, and a general chemical balance, I can actually see how this could be. For example, if your liver dumps a load of toxins into your system, it could conceivably affect your consciousness, so maybe there's something to the theory.

DAVID

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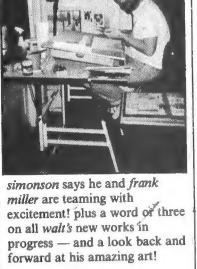

simonson says he and *frank miller* are teaming with excitement! plus a word or three on all *walt's* new works in progress — and a look back and forward at his amazing art!
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"Although I rewrote the script . . . I'm

WESLEY STRICK

In his nine-year career as a screenwriter, 38-year-old Wesley Strick has piled up credits for, among others, TRUE BELIEVER with James Woods and Robert Downey Jr., CAPE FEAR with Robert DeNiro, the hit chiller ARACHNOPHOBIA — and none for the 1992 blockbuster BATMAN RETURNS, although he wrote the shooting script. And therein lies a convoluted Hollywood tale, one of sundry such singular stories Strick licks off in the following phone interview from his Los Angeles home . . .

DAN HAGEN: *How did you get into the business?*

WESLEY STRICK: How did I? I went to college with a guy who sort of made it in the business, and just encouraged me to give it a shot. And I wrote a screenplay, which was FINAL ANALYSIS. I don't know if you've . . . ?

DAN: *I know the title. Refresh my memory.*

WESLEY: With **Richard Gere** and **Kim Basinger.** It was released about three months ago. But it was quite a few years ago that I wrote the script.

DAN: *So it was that long a process . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was that kind of hellish Hollywood development thing.

DAN: *Was the FINAL ANALYSIS script a labor of love, or . . . ?*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was a spec script. I wrote it at work. I was working at a life insurance company, and I wrote it when the boss wasn't looking.

DAN: *It's about psychiatry, isn't it?*

WESLEY: Yeah, the hero is a forensic psychiatrist who gets trapped by a demented, manipulative **Kim Basinger.**

DAN: *Here's an odd coincidence, but there's a book called PSYCHIATRY IN THE CINEMA . . .*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah. I've heard about it. I haven't seen it.

DAN: *The co-authors are family friends of mine, the Gabbards. They're brothers who grew up here in Charleston, Illinois. One of them is a psychoanalyst and the other is a professor of comparative literature.*

WESLEY: Yeah, fortunately their book came out too soon for them to ridicule my movie . . .

DAN: *Exactly. They're going to do a new edition, though, so beware.* (Laughter.) *I was looking up Strick in some of my reference materials, and there's a director by the same name . . .*

WESLEY: Joseph Strick, yeah. No relation. He comes from the wealthy **Stricks.**

DAN: *Where'd you go to college?*

WESLEY: I went to UC Berkeley.

DAN: *And where'd you grow up?*

WESLEY: Manhattan.

DAN: *What's the Writers Guild rules thing, then, regarding BATMAN RETURNS?*

WESLEY: What it is, is that although I rewrote the script, I lost the credit arbitration. So, you know, technically I'm not supposed to claim credit for having been involved in the film. So it does get a little dicey, and I'm not really sure how much I should . . .

DAN: *Yeah, well, we'll work around*

All BATMAN RETURNS photos accompanying this interview courtesy Warner Bros., TM & ©1992 DC Comics, Inc.

not supposed to claim credit for the film."

that.

WESLEY: I mean, we can talk off the record.

DAN: *Let me know when you want to go off the record, and we'll exclude those areas.*

WESLEY: Okay.

DAN: *Can you talk in general terms about the movie?*

WESLEY: I think so. Ask me the questions and I'll kind of make a judgment.

DAN: *Sure. My presumption was that you can't take specific credit for, like, "This was my scene, that was my scene.*

WESLEY: Yeah. Because, according to the bylaws, I'm not supposed to take credit at all.

DAN: *But you did work on the movie, and they can't take that away from you, presumably.*

WESLEY: That's true! *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *What's that rule all about, anyway?*

WESLEY: Well, you see, for years, I guess in the '30s and '40s, the writers felt that they were abused in terms of credits by producers and studio heads who would sort of put the names of their own nephew on the film. And so the Guild fought hard over the years to make the issue of credits just between and among writers, with the idea being that we'd be fair about it. And their other premise is that they like to limit the number of writers credited on a film, because on the average Hollywood movie, and especially a big-budget film, they have what they derisively call in the trade "serial writers." You know, one will come in after the next. There will be projects on which perhaps five, six, seven writers have labored. Out of those seven, one or two will get credit, you see. When the film is made, they appoint a committee of arbitrators who look at the material and determine who sort of made the biggest contribution, and they shut out the other writers on the theory that if you put a lot of writers' names up on the screen it tends to devalue the credit. So that's the theory. Unfortunately, that has the effect, sometimes, of depriving somebody . . .

DAN: *Of legitimate credit.*

WESLEY: Yeah, that happened to me. But it happens a lot.

DAN: *What was your involvement in the project, then?*

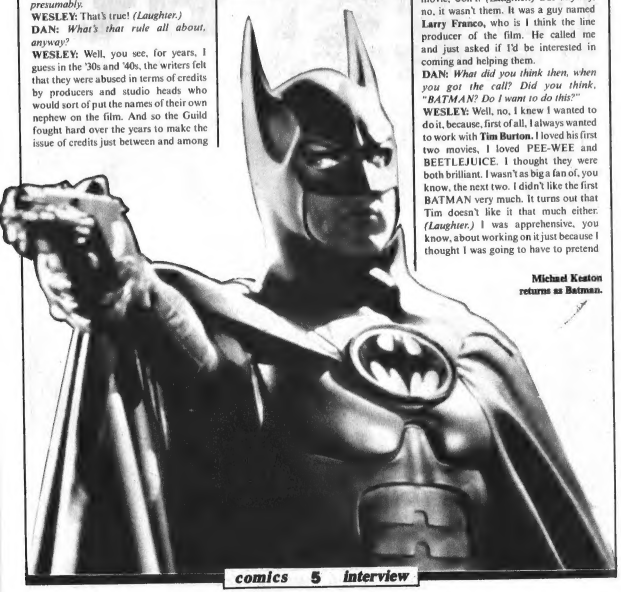
WESLEY: Well, last July I got a call from the producer, who I didn't know, but I think Warner Bros. had recommended me.

DAN: *Was it Jon Peters or Peter Guber or . . .?*

WESLEY: No, they're not involved. I think maybe their names are on it. You see, that's funny. Two guys that had nothing to do with the sequel have their names on it because of certain contractual deals that were made, whereas I who, like, rewrote the whole movie, don't. *(Laughter.)* But anyway, no, it wasn't them. It was a guy named **Larry Franco,** who is I think the line producer of the film. He called me and just asked if I'd be interested in coming and helping them.

DAN: *What did you think then, when you got the call? Did you think, "BATMAN? Do I want to do this?"*

WESLEY: Well, no, I knew I wanted to do it, because, first of all, I always wanted to work with **Tim Burton.** I loved his first two movies, I loved PEE-WEE and BEETLEJUICE. I thought they were both brilliant. I wasn't as big a fan of, you know, the next two. I didn't like the first BATMAN very much. It turns out that Tim doesn't like it that much either. *(Laughter.)* I was apprehensive, you know, about working on it just because I thought I was going to have to pretend



Michael Keaton returns as Batman.

"I didn't like the first BATMAN much.

Danny DeVito as the villainous Penguin.

Tim Burton thinks it was kind of boring."

the whole time that I was a huge fan of the first movie, but I quickly learned that Tim thinks that it was kind of . . . actually, he calls it boring.

DAN: *Really?*

WESLEY: I think he felt that it was out of his control. He had never made a movie on that scale before, it was a huge budget, too, for him at the time, and a lot of pressure. Clearly, having **Jon Peters** breathing down your neck also makes life difficult. And **Nicholson,** you know, is a big star. And I think Kim is not that easy. So between all of that, I think Tim kind of felt that it was a big ocean liner that was sailing, with or without him.

DAN: *The captain was somewhat irrelevant?*

WESLEY: Yeah, really, that does happen. So I think part of his incentive to do a second movie, aside from the big payday, was that I think he saw the sequel as a chance to really improve on the first movie, and sort of correct some of the conceptual mistakes that he felt he'd made the first time. And also, take advantage of the lesson he had learned on the first movie. I mean, he told me that he felt that only in the last three or four weeks of shooting the original film did he figure out how best to make a BATMAN movie. Like the best ways in which to show Batman . . .

DAN: *I was wondering about that, because I've talked to several people — among them Danny Bilson, who co-write the ROCKETEER screenplay and co-produced the FLASH TV show with Paul DeMeo, and Frank Miller — who all somewhat indicated that they found it kind of boring, too.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think it really pains Tim to talk about it. He doesn't like to discuss it, and he only talks about it when he has to — you know, when he has to refer to it for work purposes to make a point.

DAN: *There were only one or two times there where I saw scenes like Batman crashing through the skylight. You keep expecting to see superhero scenes, you know, where suddenly the awesome presence is there . . .*

WESLEY: Well, that's funny. He's not that interested in that. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Well, then you want to see something else of equal interest, you know?*

WESLEY: I think what Tim is interested in — aside from the visual things that he amuses himself with, and which he's quite brilliant at — in terms of the characters of the story, I think he's most interested in their neurotic compulsions. That's where he connects with Batman. He sees him as a — I mean, he's said this himself — he sees him as fucked up. And a guy who sort of hides from the world, and sort of only comes out at night, and doesn't quite know what he's doing. *(Laughter.)* I think he feels that way about himself as an artist, and I think that's how he connects with Bruce Wayne. Not as a superhero, but almost as an anti-hero. And he's really very little interested in the action. I mean, he knows that he has to deliver a certain amount of it or the audience will lynch him. And he wants it to be ingenious, but it's kind of a pain for him to have to think about, you know, big fights and all that. They're not his big interest.

DAN: *Well, that part of it I thought came through in the first movie — Michael Keaton as the neurotic Bruce Wayne was a fascinating touch.*

WESLEY: In fact — he never said this to me, but when he was making the first one he told somebody and this got back to me — his whole kind of take on the film and on the character was that Batman was a guy who didn't really know how to relate to women.

DAN: *Right. That comes through in Keaton's performance. And that isolation, too. This double life thing which doesn't permit any human beings in it, really, except Alfred . . .*

WESLEY: Right, except Alfred. But that, in a way, only emphasizes the loneliness.

DAN: *Exactly. Stan Lee once said that if you're going to do a superhero movie, you don't worry about the action — and actually, I suppose action's not really that easy to do — but the whole point is to try to make real people out of these characters, which are going to be even harder to accept than in an ordinary screenplay . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think that's true, because you're asking us to swallow a lot. Although with Tim, you know, his whole film universe is so stylized that I think you have to enter into it from frame one or not at all. You know, he doesn't really try to seduce you . . .

DAN: *Into believing it's reality?*

WESLEY: No, not at all. He presents his own reality, which is very unique to Tim. I think the reason it works, though, is that it's such a sort of intense vision. It's so vivid. Tim is just imaginative. It doesn't derive, obviously, from other sources. It's just unique to Tim, and I think you just accept it.

DAN: *Which makes it work well for the comic-book thing, in part, because that too is its own universe.*

WESLEY: Right. By the way, I don't know if you know this, but he also did not grow up a Batman fan, or even particularly a comic-book fan.

DAN: *I wondered about that.*

WESLEY: No, he wasn't a comic-book fanatic and he had no particular love for Batman.

DAN: *So he's coming to it fresh?*

WESLEY: Yeah, he is, and I was, too. I didn't have any expertise in the area, myself.

DAN: *Had you read them as a kid, or . . .?*

WESLEY: Yeah, a couple. But it wasn't real influential on me. I mean, I was as aware of Batman as any other American kid.

DAN: *Well, being the same age, we were both kids when the TV show hit it big . . .*

WESLEY: That's right, and it's funny. I've got to say that one of the big pitfalls for me — just about the only thing that I had any difficulty with in working on the film — was that occasionally I would write dialogue that was a little more, I think, appropriate for the television show or derived from the TV show than the original film. Because I was more familiar with the television show. You know, I've seen dozens of episodes as a kid, and only saw the first film once or twice. So on a few occasions there were lines of dialogue that were more suited to the style of the television show, and Tim had a pretty good radar for that. *(Laughter.)* He'd make me fix it. He hates cuteisness, and that was essentially what the TV show is. It's kind of precious, and he doesn't like that.

DAN: *The first BATMAN movie, I know a lot of people who really liked it — and obviously a lot of people did, looking at the business it did. And I know a lot of people who say, "But I didn't like it."*

WESLEY: Actually, a friend of mine made a funny comment about the box-office success of it. He said, "Imagine how much money it would have made if people liked it." *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Exactly, exactly. Which is a very odd statement, but somehow true.*

WESLEY: It's odd, but yes, there's some truth in it. I think this new one is a lot more likable, in fact.

DAN: *Which is what I've been hoping for.*

WESLEY: I think it's true. I've only seen a rough version of it, and it's hard to judge sometimes. And also because of my closeness to it, I can't be objective. But I think it is more warm-hearted, in a

"There was going to be a black Robin.

way. Tim would hate to hear me say that, but it's true. There's a kind of bigger-heartedness to it. I found the first one kind of nasty and needlessly kind of macabre and morbid. You know, all those images of the sardonic smile that were central to the whole story of the Joker, I found pretty off-putting. You know, I wouldn't let my kids watch it.

DAN: *And there, too, Batman and the Joker are, in a way, two grim psychotics who've taken over Gotham City . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, they are. And **Danny DeVito** is pretty psychotic in the new one, but I think what modifies the mood of it is **Michelle Pfeiffer.** Catwoman. Just adding her to the equation changes everything, and I think for the better.

DAN: *And, you know, these are all elements originally from the comic books of the '40s, so there won't be any objection from fans to seeing all this . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, I wouldn't think so, although I'm not all that familiar with the origin of Catwoman, traditionally, in the comic books.

DAN: *Um hmm. She was a character from 1940, originally.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I've noticed some reprints of old comic books in the bookstores featuring Catwoman, I guess they've just reprinted them to coincide with the film. And I know that the movie, you know, takes liberties with that . . .

DAN: *Oh, I'm sure. But this is, after all, a Batman who begins in the '90s, or the late '80s. So it's the legend recreated. What about Robin. What happened to him?*

WESLEY: He's out. He was briefly in. I think **Dan Waters,** who wrote the original draft, has said already in the press that neither he nor Tim was a big fan of Robin. You know, I don't think either of them knew quite what to do with him. **Waters,** I think, described him as a queasy little kid. *(Laughter.)* He was in when I took the script, but he was called "The Kid" and he was a garage mechanic and sort of a street urchin who kind of had a way with an automobile. And he helped Batman at a critical point in the story. But I sort of felt that his helping Batman then undermined Batman a little bit. It just sort of detracted from our sense of Batman's capabilities. And also, as it turns out, the shoot was so arduous and it ran so long and the movie was so costly that, about halfway through the show, people were looking for places to save. And one of them was clearly by cutting the kid. It saved pages.

DAN: *Sure. And you're introducing two new costumed characters, at least. If you introduce three, you're really piling it on with a trowel.*

WESLEY: Yeah, that's right. It was an embarrassment of riches. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *I heard one of the Wayans kids was supposed to play it?*

WESLEY: Yeah, it was, I think, **Marlon Wayans.** That was the only thing I felt bad about, was that the kid had already been cast and he must have thought that this was his big break, which it would have been.

DAN: *These are the IN LIVING COLOR guys, right?*

WESLEY: It's the younger brother.

DAN: *So we were going to have a black Robin, which would be interesting.*

WESLEY: There was going to be a black Robin. Another was I think Tim was a little nervous about that, too, because he didn't want it to seem as though he had set out to cast Robin as black. I think he felt that that was, somehow, a little condescending and also contrived. In fact, he auditioned a lot of different actors, black and white, and just settled on Marlon because he liked him. But I think he was also apprehensive that it was going to be seen as his attempt to be "racially correct." And he didn't want to be cast in that role as the Great Liberal Director.

DAN: *And I keep thinking, "Gee, if I want to know who Batman is, I'd look around Gotham City for a millionaire white guy living with a black kid."* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Right. That seems like a kind of pathetic Hollywood fantasy. But I think everyone was relieved to see Robin go — except for **Marlon Wayans,** I guess. That was the only thing that I felt sort of sad about.

DAN: *Sure. You say, "pathetic Hollywood fantasy?" I didn't follow you there.*

WESLEY: Oh, just that a millionaire entrepreneur like Bruce Wayne would . . . It just seemed phony.

DAN: *And it sticks out like a sore thumb. The first kid did, anyway. I mean, Dick Grayson does, too.*

WESLEY: It didn't really work.

DAN: *Not that we have to have believability in these, of course.*

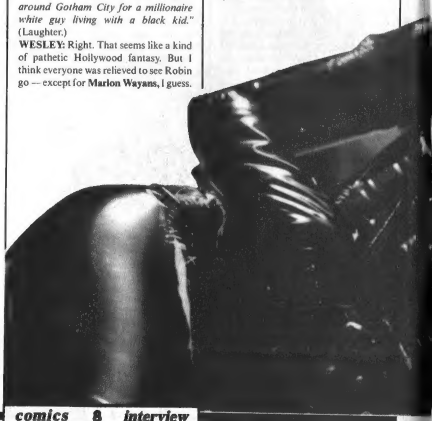
WESLEY: No, but I mean dramatically, it's just awkward. I think it was a smart move of them to have left him out of the first one.

DAN: *Well, the comic, you know, ran a year or so before Robin was introduced.*

WESLEY: I can remember liking him as a kid. I think I identified with him, you know, as a 10-year-old.

DAN: *You did? I sort of thought he was in the way. I identified with Batman. The other problem — although you could turn this into a clever dramatic plus — is why would an adult man drag a kid into gunfire all the time?* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: That's true. And, in fact, in the screenplay that was a problem, and we were bending over backwards to try to explain it, and just got pretty silly after a point.



Everyone was glad to see Robin go."

DAN: *Let's see, other things. Michael Gough. Is he still in it?*

WESLEY: Yeah.

DAN: *Great.*

WESLEY: Yeah, he's a terrific guy. He's wonderful. (Pauses, chuckling over a memory.) He had a few, you know, complaints about his dialogue in the script, and I spent an evening with him. And it turned out he wanted me to change things like "can" to "shall." *(Laughter.)* It was really sweet.

DAN: *Oh, how demanding of him!* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Exactly. And unlike most actors who don't like the dialogue you write, but can't begin to give you an inkling of what they would want, he knew exactly what changes he wanted to make. and it was like four words, altogether. He's a wonderful guy.

DAN: *That's superb. You know, you flip on the TV and you see black-and-white movies and there's Michael Gough in this and that . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, he's been in everything! Before I went to meet him, I read his resume, and it was just extraordinary.

DAN: *Right. And that whole Alfred thing was such a nice touch in the first one. It brings Batman down to earth here. He doesn't have any great awe about Batman.*

WESLEY: No, not at all. He's just sort of concerned about him, about his mental stability.

Michelle Pfeiffer as the Catwoman.

DAN: *A gem of a character. What about Keaton? Did you run into him much?*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah. I worked with him quite a bit.

DAN: *How was that?*

WESLEY: Fine. He's very energetic. He's full of ideas. We had like one really big, intense session. And he also, like Tim, having done one of the movies already, sort of knew what works for Batman. And I think the thing that they both discovered after having done the first film is that brevity works best. When the guy's standing there in this essentially silly outfit on the big screen, he just can't start making speeches, because the camera has to linger on that. You need to find sort of the pithiest ways for him to express himself. He also needs to be concealed in shadow, and one of the tricks is that, you know, "now-you-see-him, now-you-don't." And a lot of it is done in clever cutting, where you return to the angle and he's gone. You know, you don't actually have to take him out of the frame.

DAN: *Sure. They did some of that in the first one . . .*

WESLEY: Yeah, and it worked really well.

DAN: *That's part of what I was talking about earlier as the superheroic awe thing. You know, you can always go, "Who-? Where is he? Who is he? What is he?"*

WESLEY: That's right. And the audiences don't seem to tire of that particular effect. Plus it's economical, from every standpoint.

DAN: *Yeah, that's a great one. I had read a story somewhere saying that in the first one, Keaton had decided to, or someone had advised him to, "let the costume act" as Batman.*

WESLEY: Oh, is that right? I didn't hear that.

DAN: *Yeah. I think that's something of the same thing that you're saying, you know? Be brief, let the costume state its presence, emerge and vanish.*

WESLEY: Right, yeah. There are a couple of confrontations between Penguin and Batman, and one of them had been a little on the wordy side. And I think Tim just wanted me to pare it to, you know, literally 10 words, because he just didn't want to hold a two-shot with these two guys standing there, these two grown-ups, in all these prosthetics, trading *bon mots. (Laughter.)* That gets silly.

DAN: *And in this case with, as you say, all the stuff there, the visuals carry it anyway, or can.*

WESLEY: They do. They're the most impressive aspect of it, so you just don't

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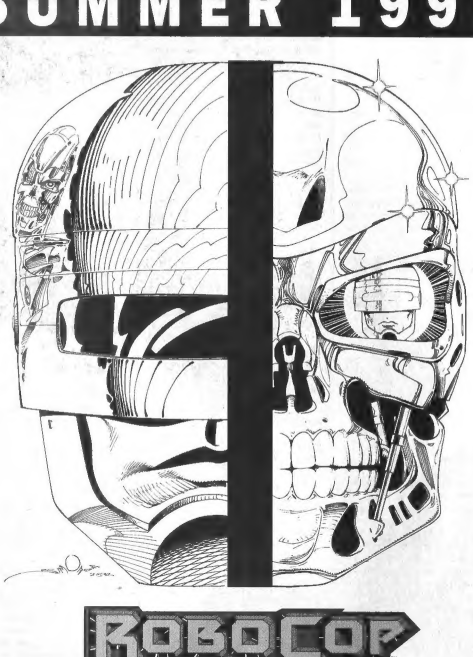

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"Just to type the word 'Batman' is exciting."

need to fill their mouths with all kinds of arch dialogue, which we've all heard already.

DAN: *That's fascinating. You've done all these realistic movies. Is it tougher doing a superhero or just a different set of problems?*

WESLEY: No, I thought it was really easy and really fun.

DAN: *Really?*

WESLEY: Yeah, very.

DAN: *In what ways?*

WESLEY: Well, partly it was fun because Tim, I think as I said to you before, was remarkably open. And I say "remarkable" because it's a big movie. The pressure on him was immense. He didn't know me. We'd never met before. And, when I was hired, it was about eight weeks before the start of shooting. And he gave me a lot of freedom. So right away, it's like an actor with a director, when you feel that you have the director's confidence, you do better work. So that was one of the reasons. That doesn't necessarily have anything specifically to do with this material, but it was just Tim, who gave me the space to just kind of do what I do. But also, I think it's a real relief to take a holiday from kind of grim reality. Having just come off CAPE FEAR, where we were trying for verisimilitude in almost every aspect of it, it was just fun. It's a fantasy, so you get to be fantastic, and that at least in small doses can be really liberating.

DAN: *I'm glad to hear you have that attitude toward it. Some people might say, "Oh, this crap . . ."*

WESLEY: Oh, no, not at all. I think there's the potential to do really brilliant stuff within that really stylized concept. Batman is an American icon. Just to be working on your computer and type the word "Batman" is kind of exciting. Like you're participating in something that is really central to the culture.

DAN: *I've just always wanted to compile a lot of interviews and materials, you know, which say, "What the hell does this stuff mean? And why do we believe in something so silly?"*

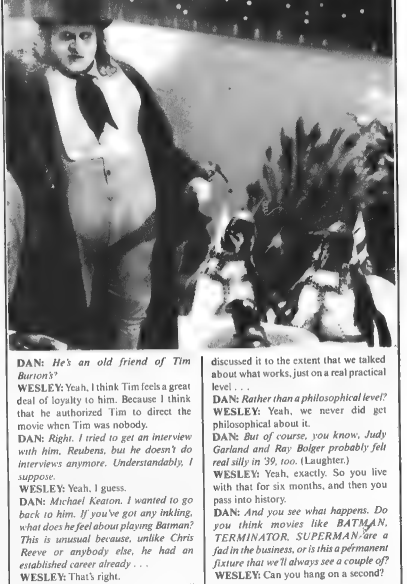
WESLEY: Right. Why do we suspend disbelief when we should know better?

DAN: *For something so outre, I think it says a lot about America.*

WESLEY: Both good and bad.

DAN: *Right, both good and bad. Let's see, what else? Paul Reubens, Pee-Wee. Is there anything you can say about him? I hear he has a cameo.*

WESLEY: Yeah, he's on real briefly as the Penguin's father. He just appears right at the beginning of the movie.



DAN: *He's an old friend of Tim Burton's?*

WESLEY: Yeah, I think Tim feels a great deal of loyalty to him. Because I think that he authorized Tim to direct the movie when Tim was nobody.

DAN: *Right. I tried to get an interview with him, Reubens, but he doesn't do interviews anymore. Understandably, I suppose.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I guess.

DAN: *Michael Keaton, I wanted to go back to him. If you've got any inkling, what does he feel about playing Batman? This is unusual because, unlike Chris Reeve or anybody else, he had an established career already . . .*

WESLEY: That's right.

DAN: *He was doing very well. But he still takes on this sort of secondary career as an icon.*

WESLEY: Yeah, I don't know, we never discussed it. It's funny. You know, I think everybody connected with the film feels a little bit divided about it. There is a part of people that knows, in a way, it's silly, and "Why are we wearing tights and standing on a refrigerated sound stage for six months?" And then I think the other part of everyone involved feels, yeah, that we're all creating a myth, a living myth. So I don't know, because Keaton and I never discussed it. We only discussed it to the extent that we talked about what works, just on a real practical level . . .

DAN: *Rather than a philosophical level?*

WESLEY: Yeah, we never did get philosophical about it.

DAN: *But of course, you know, Judy Garland and Ray Bolger probably felt real silly in 39, too.* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Yeah, exactly. So you live with that for six months, and then you pass into history.

DAN: *And you see what happens. Do you think movies like BATMAN, TERMINATOR, SUPERMAN are a fad in the business, or is this a permanent fixture that we'll always see a couple of?*

WESLEY: Can you hang on a second?

DAN: *Sure.*

WESLEY: Patty? *(A muffled few seconds' exchange in the background.)* Hi.

DAN: *Hi. I was just saying, these fantasy films, a fad or a permanent thing?*

WESLEY: Oh, I think it's permanent. I believe we'll see more, if only because the technology has improved immensely, and there's been this real great leap in the last year or two that I think TERMINATOR 2 was probably the vanguard of in terms of digital composite optical effects.

DAN: *Here are the things you saw in comic books, you know, but now you see*

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"You can't make a good film from a lousy script."

Cats prey upon birds — but prefer bats.

them *actually*.

WESLEY: That's right. Well, you know, what's extraordinary from a technological point of view is that now that film images can be scanned digitally and played with and then restored to film resolution, there's no loss of quality. It's not like optical processes, where you keep generating one image from the previous one and losing massive amounts of detail. And also, because of all that, you can see the special effects much quicker than ever before. Almost before your eyes, a director can supervise the creation of an optical effect.

DAN: *So it's sort of like rushes, eh?*

WESLEY: Yeah, exactly. It's pretty much in that time frame, so you're not really constrained that way.

DAN: *So you're not working in the dark with a blue background and hoping it all comes out all right?*

WESLEY: That's right. Or, if you do use a blue screen, there's a whole margin of error now that's huge. There used to be this thing called "blue spill," which is a problem. You could only light the set, when you were working with blue screen, in a really sort of limited way that adversely affected the look of the frame. But now the blue spill itself can be painted out digitally, and so can things like wires that people are suspended on when they're supposed to be flying. So I think just because it's easier, and I think ultimately it will become cheaper, it's inevitable that filmmakers will take advantage of the technology.

DAN: *Sure. Audiences are always ready to be astounded.*

WESLEY: Absolutely. And now I think the potential to astound them is greater than ever.

DAN: *This is off-topic entirely, but I also wanted to ask you about the screenwriter's status in Hollywood —*

WESLEY: Yes?

DAN: *— what do you think of it?*

WESLEY: It's pretty rotten. *(Laughter.)* It's pretty bad. It's not only bad for the political problems of screenwriters, *vis a vis* directors and studios. But, I think, just because of the way movies are made, in Hollywood particularly, the problem with being a screenwriter is that you don't actually make the movie. You know, you're *not* the filmmaker. I sometimes say that the definition of a screenwriter is, "He who doesn't have anything to do with the film."

DAN: *You're a resource.*

WESLEY: It's funny. Even with an original script, when you create the characters and the whole world and the whole story and you feel briefly omnipotent, you show up on the set and you find that there isn't even a spare set of headphones for you to listen to dialogue. And, you know, you try to scrounge one from the sound crew. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *It puts you in your place rather quickly, eh?*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah. You're out of it. You're not as important as, like, the third assistant director, anymore. So that is the problem, and that's, I think, why a lot of writers try to become directors.

DAN: *I've always thought the screenwriter is the great, unsung Hollywood person, you know.*

WESLEY: Oh, well . . . You're not just saying that, are you?

DAN: *No, I actually do.*

WESLEY: *(Laughter.)* No, I happen to think you're right. I don't think that you can make a good film from a lousy script.

DAN: *Being a writer myself, I have a tendency to believe that, you know?* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: Yeah, you can't just do it.

DAN: *So it's the skeleton on which any film must be hung, of course. I've interviewed several screenwriters over the years, and it's given me a feeling for that. I always think, "Why always does everyone ignore the screenwriter?" The press, too, largely.*

WESLEY: Um hmm. I don't know why that is the case. You know, there are one or two sort of superstar screenwriters who get acknowledged when their movies open . . .

DAN: *Right. Robert Towne, for example.*

WESLEY: Yeah, and even he seems to be

"Occasionally you get lucky and get to work

fading into a kind of academic obscurity. I mean, now it would be like **Joe Esterhaus. Richard Price** tends to get the press now. There's always a view, it sort of changes. I don't know why. Maybe, in a way, it's appropriate because, as I said, the writer doesn't really make the movie. That's the truth.

DAN: *But first he makes the movie in his head.*

WESLEY: Yeah, he does. But then other people — particularly the director — take it over and, you know, it does become something different.

DAN: *I don't want to denigrate them at all, but auteur, schmauteur, you know?*

WESLEY: I agree. Believe me, I've had enough run-ins with dumb directors who've screwed up my material.

DAN: *And yet, is it rewarding to you?*

WESLEY: Oh, yeah — you mean, other than financially? *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Yeah.*

WESLEY: It is. I mean, what happens is you have to accustom yourself to being grateful for seeing bits and pieces of your work on the screen. Although occasionally you get lucky and, like with me, get to work with **Martin Scorsese**. And all of the sudden, the movie on the screen is not what you had in mind — but it's better. So you get to ride **Scorsese's** coattails into movie glory. And **Tim Burton,** too, he does have a vision. You know, there's a lot of talk about the director's vision. That doesn't mean that every director has one. I think there's about five, maybe, who do. The rest just pretend to *(Laughter.)* Or they have your vision. They sort of steal it for themselves, or they screw it up.

DAN: *You're a screenwriter who works with actors. I often hear from screenwriters, "I don't want to work with actors."*

WESLEY: Yeah. They can be a real pain. *(Laughter.)* I find it's good to work with them because, if you don't, they'll go off and say their own dialogue, and it'll never be as good as yours — or rarely, anyway. Occasionally, with somebody, again, like **DeNiro,** he will deviate from what I've written and it's great. But most of them, no. If they don't like what you've written and you're not available to rework it with them, they will just walk onto the set and say whatever the hell they want. Boy, you just are horrified.

DAN: *An old friend of mine, Randy Arner, is artistic director at Steppenwolf in Chicago. He says that from the Steppenwolf actor's point of view, the dialogue is just the thing that is, somewhat inepily, expressing what the character wants. I mean, ineptly in the character's terms . . .*

WESLEY: Right.

DAN: *. . . people don't speak in metaphysical truth, they try to get at what they want. So maybe that's one reason why even some of the best actors don't feel that the particular word is absolutely necessary. Although they wouldn't fuck around with Shakespeare, of course.*

WESLEY: That's true, and then I think certain actors have limitations that they're aware of, and you have to respect them for that. I did a polish once on a film where the lead actor, who's a well-regarded movie star, was having trouble with different lines. And I finally said, "What's the matter with this? Why can't he say this?" And finally the director said, "Well, it's because it's more than three

Batman confronts the Penguin, who vows to destroy Gotham City.

with Martin Scorsese. And Tim Burton, too."

syllables. He doesn't want to say any words that have more than three syllables."

DAN: *He has a hangup about it?*

WESLEY: Well, he just felt that he couldn't do it well. So I thought, "Well, that's kind of embarrassing, but at least he knows it." So once I was armed with that information, I stopped writing words like "homicidal" in the script and I wrote, you know . . .

DAN: "*Killer.*" (Laughter.)

WESLEY: "Killer." And then we were fine. So I think it pays to work with actors, even when you don't want to bother. Because you're better off doing it.

DAN: *Yeah. I had done an interview with a TV screenwriter, Jackson Gillis, who did years of PERRY MASON and COLUMBO, which appeared in COMICS INTERVIEW #60. He said, "The actors always want to buttonhole you. 'Can you beef up my dialogue here?' If you've got 30 people coming at you, I could see how that could be a problem.*

WESLEY: Yeah. I've been on movie locations where basically I'm hiding in my hotel room because I just don't want to be subjected to that. I've had experiences where I try to fly home and, yeah, the actress keeps finding me and demanding that I do another pass at her long speech

DAN: *So, strangely, although the screenwriter is unsung and ignored, there are points at which they're all after you.*

WESLEY: Oh yeah, we get exploited straight down the line. *(Laughter.)* And everyone else takes credit, in the end.

DAN: *Do you ever look back, though, and think, "It's a fantasy life?" Growing up, surely you must have thought, "Wouldn't this be a fantastic thing to do?"*

WESLEY: Um, I never did, growing up, fantasize about being a screenwriter.

DAN: *No?*

WESLEY: No. I was a musician, and I sort of played in rock bands and stuff like that. I sort of got into this a little later in life. I know it sounds silly, but I was 29 when I wrote my first script, and I think in Hollywood terms that is a little late. These days, you see these screenwriters coming out of USC at 22 and 23, selling spec scripts for half a million dollars. *(Laughter.)* So it wasn't a lifelong fantasy of mine, and in fact I think that might be a good thing. Because I actually got, like, 10 years of real living in there, as opposed to being a product of UCLA or AFI, when my only point of reference is like other movies — which you find a lot of out here.

DAN: *It's a little incestuous?*

WESLEY: Yeah. I worked with directors who are younger than me, and all they know about is the movies on their laser disc collection. And they want to imitate them.

DAN: *And there is a thing called life out there, that art sometimes imitates.*

WESLEY: Yeah. And you don't see a lot of it when you're in the film industry, going from your house in your BMW to the studio.

DAN: *Right. So your fantasy was to be Jagger or somebody?*

WESLEY: Was it **Jagger?** No, I think it was **Dylan.**

DAN: *Dylan, okay. I've got you pegged now.* (Laughter.)

WESLEY: But I wiped out.

DAN: *Do you still play at all?*

WESLEY: Yeah, only in the privacy of my office, when I've, like, hit a snag on a script. I play electric guitar. I think I'm one of the few Jewish country guitar players in L.A. *(Laughter.)* And my wife says, "You know, let's get out of the business, move to Nashville." She always says, "It doesn't matter how old or ugly you are in country." *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Or Branson, Missouri, the up-and-coming place.*

WESLEY: That's right. That's where you open your own theater.

DAN: *Andy Williams is there now.*

WESLEY: Geez. There's a movie there. *(Laughter.)*

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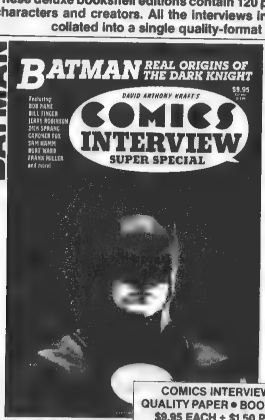

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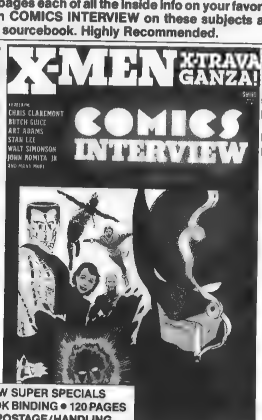

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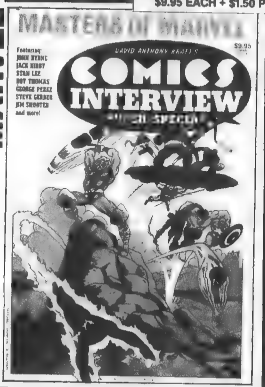

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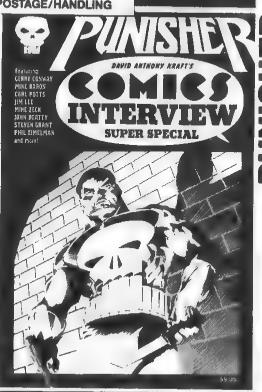

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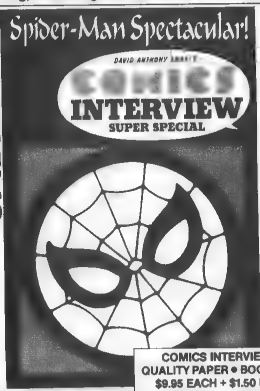

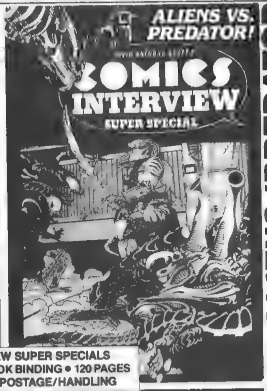

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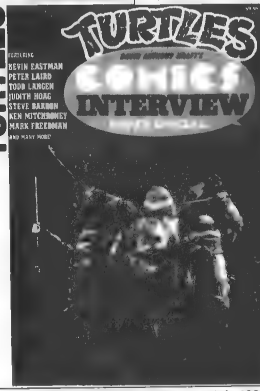

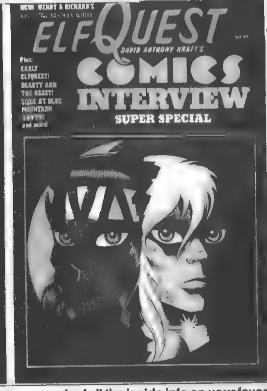

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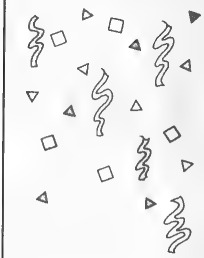

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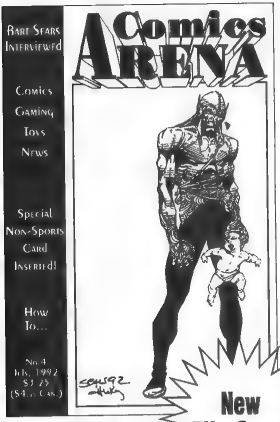

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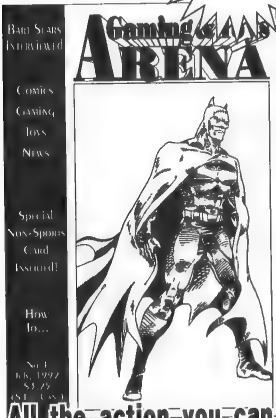

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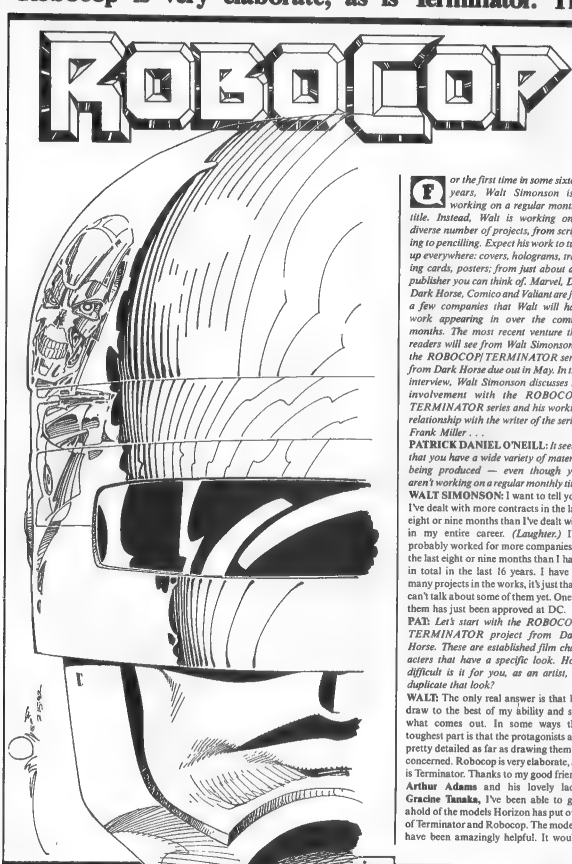


For the first time in some sixteen years, Walt Simonson isn't working on a regular monthly title. Instead, Walt is working on a diverse number of projects, from scripting to pencilling. Expect his work to turn up everywhere: covers, holograms, trading cards, posters; from just about any publisher you can think of. Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, Comico and Valiant are just a few companies that Walt will have work appearing in over the coming months. The most recent venture that readers will see from Walt Simonson is the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR series from Dark Horse due out in May. In this interview, Walt Simonson discusses his involvement with the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR series and his working relationship with the writer of the series, Frank Miller . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *It seems that you have a wide variety of material being produced — even though you aren't working on a regular monthly title.*

WALT SIMONSON: I want to tell you, I've dealt with more contracts in the last eight or nine months than I've dealt with in my entire career. *(Laughter.)* I've probably worked for more companies in the last eight or nine months than I have in total in the last 16 years. I have so many projects in the works, it's just that I can't talk about some of them yet. One of them has just been approved at DC.

PAT: *Let's start with the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR project from Dark Horse. These are established film characters that have a specific look. How difficult is it for you, as an artist, to duplicate that look?*

WALT: The only real answer is that I'll draw to the best of my ability and see what comes out. In some ways the toughest part is that the protagonists are pretty detailed as far as drawing them is concerned. Robocop is very elaborate, as is Terminator. Thanks to my good friend **Arthur Adams** and his lovely lady **Gracine Tanaka,** I've been able to get ahold of the models Horizon has put out of Terminator and Robocop. The models have been amazingly helpful. It would

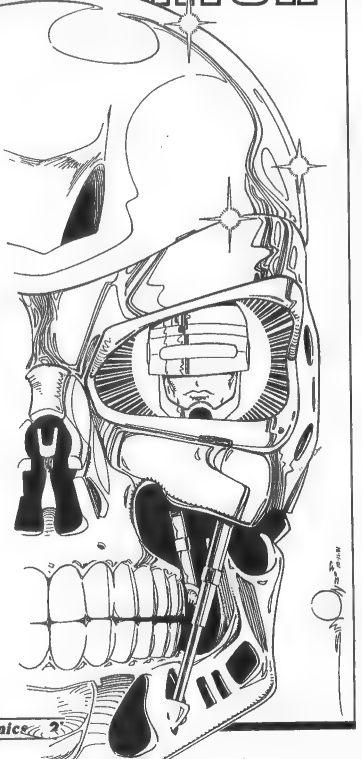
ROBOCOP TM & ©1992 Orion Pictures Corp. / Terminator TM & ©1992 Cinema '84, a Greenberg Brothers Partnership. Licensed by Hemdale Film Corp. / Manhunter, Metal Men, Batman & Dr. Fate ©1992 DC Comics Inc. / Archangel, Fantastic Four, Justice Peace, Hela, Wolverine, Ulik, Hulk, Apocalypse & X-Men ©1992 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. / Magnus, Rai, Solar, Shadowman, Harbinger, Archer & Armstrong, X-O Man/O'Mar & Eternal

breakdown and drawing is dictated by Miller's stories."

VERSUS TERMINATOR

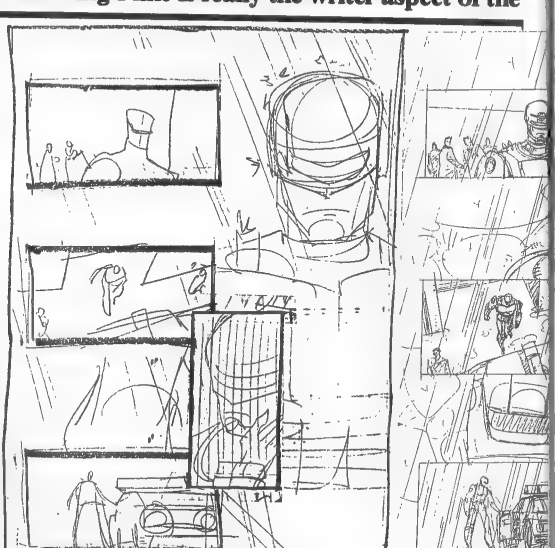
have been a nightmare to pencil the characters without the models. The story breakdown and the drawing is dictated by **Frank Miller's** stories. In much of the work I've done in the past I've tried to bring in my background from art school, where you're taught that illustration is really problem solving and that your job is really communication. You're given a problem and you try to communicate that as clearly as you can in a single drawing. It's a little different from comics but the communication is the key link. What I've done in the past when I've gotten a project, whether it was THOR, FANTASTIC FOUR or MANHUNTER, is to draw it in a fashion that I think is appropriate for that character or that set of circumstances. In MANHUNTER we were doing 20-page stories with eight pages of backup and I used a lot of panels. I'm not a photo-realist as far as my art is concerned, but we wanted to make it as realistic as possible. I went back and looked at a lot of the MODESTY BLAISE work. I tried to give it a real feel; real weapons, choppers, whatever it was; I had to get ahold of a lot of what I was drawing. The METAL MEN was basically wonky cartoon fun. THOR for me, when I did it for the three or four years was, in a way, a conservative book. It's a book that reflects back; it's a book of mythology. The tension in the book was created by blending mythology and science fiction. I improvised a lot of the mythological because I felt that was what made THOR different from a lot of other comics. The storytelling wasn't particularly flashy and was pretty conservative. I tried to get big images with big perspectives; Thor walking down hallways that are miles long. FANTASTIC FOUR was different, a hard-edged comic. I don't know if I ever ruled a line in THOR; in the FANTASTIC FOUR I ruled lots of lines in an effort to create a hard edge for the high-tech look and feel. I try to let a book take its own direction to a certain extent.

PAT: *It would seem to me that to a certain extent, some of the visual feel of TERMINATOR and ROBOCOP*



Warrior ©1982 Valiant, a division of Voyager Communications, Inc.

"I find the thing I like is really the writer aspect of the



Here and across the page we're able to follow Walt's full process: beginning with the initial "layouts" (based, of course, on Frank's detailed story outlines) . . . on to the pencils and, lastly . . . the finished inks (along with the lettering).

should be similar to the FANTASTIC FOUR in the sense of it being brittle and hard-edged.

WALT: I have to say that I'm a lot better at doing that stuff now than I was two years ago. There were certain techniques that I developed when I was doing the FANTASTIC FOUR. One of them was as simple as ruling a line with a crow quill pen. I had never really figured out how to rule a straight line with a crow quill pen without getting a blob for a line because of moving the ruler or a shaky hand. Somewhere in the course of doing the FF I figured out how to do it and now every line in sight is ruled with a flexible pen.

PAT: *You mentioned Frank Miller's contribution to the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR series. What are the working arrangements on this? Are you working from full scripts?*

WALT: No, actually we debated about that in the beginning. The two of us had talked about working together in the past on a DAREDEVIL story. That was pre-DARK KNIGHT and pre-X-FACTOR for me. Because of the timing at Marvel it never worked out. By the time Marvel was able to take the story we were off on other projects. In that case Frank did write a full script for what would have been the first of two issues of DAREDEVIL. This time around we talked quite a bit about it. We kind of waffled back and forth about doing it full-script or doing it Marvel style. I think I've done most of my work Marvel style most of my career and very few stories from full script. The very first METAL MEN was done full-script. On the other hand, I think Frank has done more full-script work, particularly when he's not drawing it. We had a lot of discussion about it and ultimately decided to do it Marvel style and see what happens. If it didn't work out we had four issues to work on it so we could go back and do it another way that would work for both of us. As it turned out, speaking for myself, I'm completely satisfied and extremely happy the way it has worked out doing it Marvel style. I

stories. The visual aspect — maybe because it's Frank."

RAIN FALLS. THE HUMANS HURRY TO SHELTER
STRIKING HIS HELMET, NOT CHEST
HE LISTENS TO IT
IT SERVES TO PASS THE TIME
RAIN AWAY AS A VISUAL SOUND
RAIN AWAY AS EVERYTHING— EXCEPT THE SALE, OF COURSE

think Frank has had no difficulty in writing it Marvel style and, in fact, I think he's had a lot of fun writing it Marvel style. We actually hit it first crack out of the box and I don't anticipate any changes for the rest of the series.

PAT: *I would imagine that Frank, being an artist himself, would be a very visual writer.*

WALT: He is, but with Robocop and Terminator it's hard because they don't go down in the smoking lounge and have coffee. Writing the visuals is tough. I'm really happy with Frank's work. There was a great bit that Frank wrote into the first issue that I think is really hysterical and I think is going to work out really well in the comic. I find that the thing I like about the story is really the writer aspect of the stories. The visual aspect — maybe because it's Frank, maybe I take it for granted — but the manner in which Frank writes it, you can see the structure in the plots. It may not sound like much but you get it all: set-ups, pay-offs, the introduction of the characters — hey, it's a pleasure to work with a professional writer. I've been real lucky because I've worked with a lot of them. It's really a pleasure to work with a guy that knows his way around a word processor. The thing I'm most impressed with is the quality of the structure of Frank's writing. I will say that Frank probably takes longer to plot these than any other writer I've worked with. I don't mean he takes forever; he works on it a little, puts it aside, and then comes back and works on it a little more. I think the time and care shows.

PAT: *Is the storytelling fairly dense, in the sense that there's a lot happening?*

WALT: We're doing issues where we have some flexibility. We can do something between 26 and 32 pages for each issue depending on how the breakdowns work. In the plots I get from Frank he breaks it down page-by-page with the proviso that if I need to expand stuff I can get bold of him. We talk back and forth all of the time on this project. I

An early self-portrait of CTHULHU, from Lovecraft's mythos. Walt was going to school in Providence, RI, at the time (not far from where Lovecraft lived) and was *very* into Lovecraft.

©1971/92 Walter Simonson

"There's a structure that reminds me of MANHUNTER."

guess there is a lot denser storytelling in the first issue, although the second issue has a higher density — if you're talking *fight* density. *(Laughter.)* MANHUNTER was like ten or 12 panels on a page. This, for the most part, isn't done that way. There's a sequence in the second issue with Robocop and Terminator with an incident between a small boy and a Terminator and as it happens, towards the end of the story, I was able to do a reprise of that scene turned upside-down. I didn't realize that in the plot, but as I was doing the thumbnails I realized I could make it as if, graphically, you were looking through the other end of the telescope. There's a certain structure in the art that reminds me of the MANHUNTER stuff, but I'm not going to have 85 panels on the page. I am trying to keep a certain large quality as well. For example, when Robocop shows up for the first time I do it as a full-page splash. They are, after all, larger-than-life characters.

PAT: *So you thumbnail out the entire book before you draw it?*

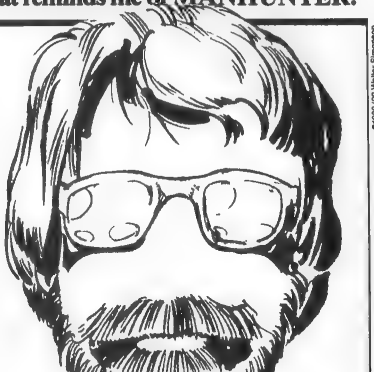
WALT: Well, yes, that's how I've worked for years. Even on my own plots, I usually draw out 22 little boxes on a sheet of typewriter paper and then write little notes into each box. Each box is one page of comic. I then go back and draw a large box on a single page and that equates out to each page of the comic. I do the thumbnails in those and use them to determine the composition of the panels and the page.

PAT: *I've talked to quite a few artists who ink their own work. When you ink your own work, does a lot of drawing get left to the inking stage?*

WALT: In the early parts of the job, the pencils are much tighter than most people would think. I find that I'm pretty comfortable if I have a tight pencil drawing, because when I'm inking it I'm free to do almost whatever I want to. Most of my finished drawing ends up in the inks, but I have a pretty detailed pencil underneath to help guide my inking. I do find that as I go along in a job the early parts of the job have the tightest pencils and the later issues are much looser. Simply because as I go along I become more accustomed to drawing with a pen.

PAT: *When you're designing a page, is there a layout that you have in mind?*

WALT: It's a combination of things. One of the things about comics I like is that it's such a hybrid form of stuff. Not just words and pictures but individual panels over the course of a page that all work together. You have to pull all of the elements together to make it your best work possible. The design of a page, I always felt, was sort of a montage or maybe even a collage. I'm creating a page full of separate images yet when I'm finished with the page I want it to all hang together as a design. The considerations that go into that are things like, in western culture we read from left to right, and if there are diagonal panels we tend to read down the diagonal. Placement of word and thought balloons are also important. I also try to do panels



© 1990/ '92 Walter Simonson

Here and above: Two illos from March of 1990, Manhunter and Walt.

Pencils for the cover of ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR BOOK TWO.

"The stuff we turn in ... different desks for approval."

One of Walt's model sheets for a woman warrior character that he and Frank Miller created and are using in the series.

where you read across several panels and then when you get to the end of the page the last panel in that row will have visual elements that will act as a stop or brick wall. When you come up against it you automatically drop down to the row below. I used to think more about these types of things. I still think about it covertly; since I've been doing it for so long I really don't have to physically stop and think about it. Occasionally I'll run into some problem on a page that'll make me stop and think things over. I once told **Howard Chaykin** this a long time ago; he reminded me of it, actually, that you can view the page as an architectural drawing where not only are you working left to right but from top to bottom and that the bottom of the page is the bottom that the whole design rests on. I think about all of these things as I'm working on a project.

PAT: *Robocop and Terminator are both licensed characters and we know that there's an approval process that goes with the characters. How does that approval process work regarding your work?*

WALT: You're absolutely correct that there is an approval process. The stuff that we turn in, from Frank's plots to my inks, goes to two different desks for approval since the characters are actually owned by two different companies. There was an occasional change made, but so far nothing major.

PAT: *I asked because I've heard a lot of nightmare stories of working on licensed characters over the years.*

WALT: I've worked on a lot of movie projects over the years and most of them have been movie adaptations of actual movies. STAR WARS was an exception to that. With ALIEN the comic came out at the same time as the movie. We obviously were working on the book long before the movie was released and we had three different versions to work from. Our liaison with Twentieth Century Fox was **Charlie Lippincott** and he was a comics fan as well as a movie guy. He had a pretty good understanding of what we needed to do a good comic. We had all three versions and **Archie Goodwin** combined stuff from maybe all three. I actually saw a rough cut of the film in December and the movie didn't come out until April or May of the following year. We were able to incorporate some of the stuff from the movie version I saw also. Unfortunately, some of it was cut from the actual release version of the movie. I have to say that working on ALIEN was a really pleasurable experience. In my experience with movie stuff that was the only one I've ever had. *(Laughter.)*

For a variety of reasons most of the other stuff was less fun. Licensors really have their own agenda and the agenda isn't always that you necessarily do a good comic book. Which is what *my* agenda is. In the instance of ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR, the clients want the best comic we can possibly do and we're trying to oblige them.

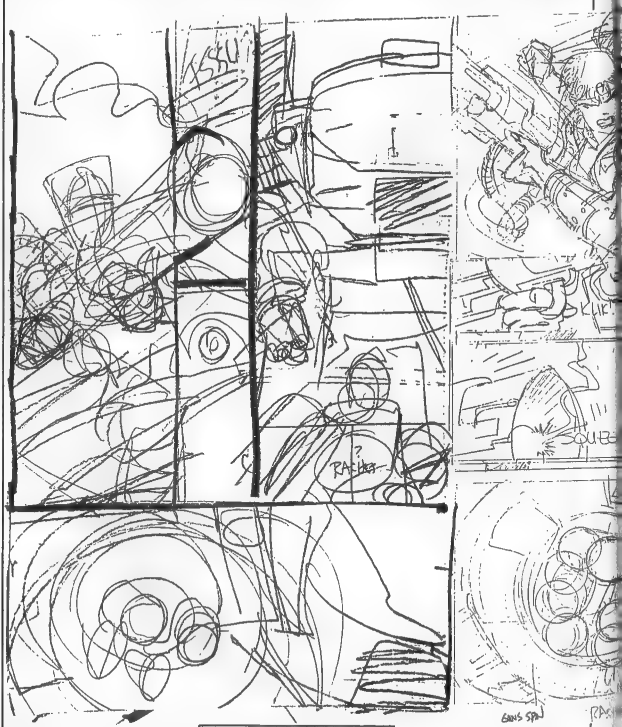
PAT *Valiant has been receiving quite a bit of press lately and appears to be a second-tier comics company on the rise. What are your thoughts or impressions of working with Jim Shooter again?*

WALT: *(Laughter.)*My impressions are fine. We go a long way back to our early Marvel days. I saw Jim for the first time since he left Marvel at the San Diego Con last year. We chatted and had a nice time. It was a very pleasant visit. I ran into him somewhere else and Valiant was really taking off. He was getting, and still is getting, a lot of work from **Barry Windsor-Smith** (which, I would parenthetically add, that I'm delighted to see because I'm second to none for being a fan of **Barry Smith's** work). One of the things I like about this whole deal is that we're seeing more of Barry's stuff than we've seen in a long time. His comics work is great and I'm happy to see it. Jim got hold of **Frank Miller** to ask if he would do some covers. I guess they discussed me and whether I would do any covers. Jim was a little unsure about calling me and Frank said, "Hey, look, he's a freelancer. Call him up — the worst he can say is no." Jim called me up and we talked about what he needed. In this case I'm working on eight covers for the second month of UNITY. It actually sounded pretty good and sounded like a lot of fun. Some of these are for books

Walt's eight covers for Valiant (clockwise): SOLAR, SHADOWMAN, HARBINGER, ETERNAL WARRIOR, X-O MANOWAR, MAGNUS, RAI and ARCHER & ARMSTRONG

"A lot of doing comics for me is the fun I have and I

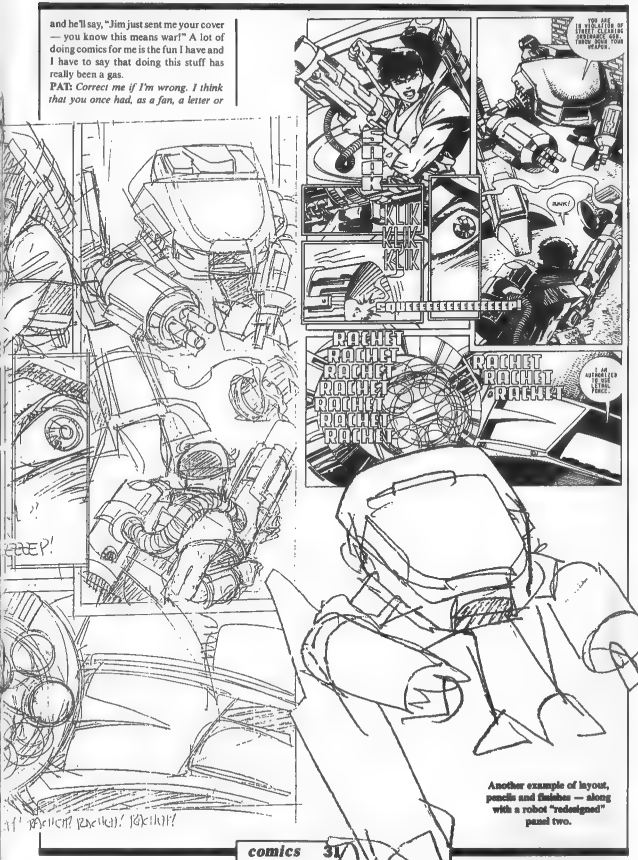
that haven't come out yet or are fairly new. Jim sent me a bunch of stuff and I have to say that the assignment is really free form. Jim has given me verbally an overall view of UNITY which I probably couldn't repeat if I wanted to. I'm getting to be an old guy and I can't remember things like I used to. *(Laughter.)* I had enough of an idea to understand the gist of the crossover. As far as the covers are concerned, it's not *carte blanche* exactly, but it's pretty damn close. To date I've done the first cover, which is being used for promotional stuff. It's been quite a pleasure working on the project. It's also fun to see what Frank's doing, also, since what we're doing graphically is as far removed as the distance between Earth and Pluto. It's fun to see what Frank is doing and then go, "Ha, I can beat that!" Of course, Frank and I talk all the time



have to say that doing this stuff has really been a gas."

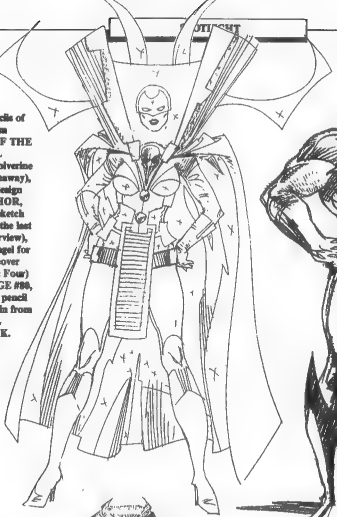
and he'll say, "Jim just sent me your cover — you know this means war!" A lot of doing comics for me is the fun I have and I have to say that doing this stuff has really been a gas.

PAT: *Correct me if I'm wrong. I think that you once had, as a fan, a letter or*



Another example of layout, pencils and finishes — along with a robot "redesigned" panel two.

Clockwise: Pencils of HELA (from HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE), Wolverine sketch (ABA giveaway), Justice Fence design sketch from THOR, detailed figure sketch (note the next to the last page of this interview), designing Archangel for X-FACTOR, cover design (Fantastic Four) for MARVEL AGE #80, and, lastly . . . a pencil piece of Ulik, again from MARVEL HANDBOOK.



FRAGE

"I've always been a TUROK fan, both because I'm a

fan of dinosaurs, and because of Alberto Gioletti."

artwork published in MAGNUS.

WALT: That's right, artwork, and Jim ran that thing again. I told him I wanted reprint money for running it! *(Laughter.)* In all seriousness, that was the first artwork I'd ever had published in a comic. It ran on a fan page in, I think, MAGNUS #10, which came out somewhere around 1964. I was a freshman in college at the time. It was a drawing of a floating robot with a gun and such. It was done in my best **Russ Manning** style and it was signed. I could be wrong but I don't imagine that the drawing I sent off was an inked drawing. It might have been, I don't remember. A few months after I sent it in an issue of MAGNUS came out that had their first fan page of drawings. A lot of guys like me were sending drawings in. I was tickled pink when it came out. Jim claims that he wasn't responsible for reprinting this stuff and that another guy in the office picked it up, so I guess Jim's off the hook as far as I'm concerned. I did sign it and it's funny because it's the same signature I use today.

PAT: *So actually, there's a bit of nostalgia to be drawing some of those characters.*

WALT: Especially drawing MAGNUS. I even enjoyed the DR. SOLAR stuff, although it was pretty hit or miss because they had so many artists working on it. I was always a TUROK, SON OF STONE fan, both because I've always been a big fan of dinosaurs and of **Alberto Gioletti.** At the time I had no idea who was drawing it but it had dinosaurs, I liked the artwork, and it was lost-land sort of stuff. It was perfect. I haven't done the DR. SOLAR or MAGNUS covers yet, but I'm sure they're going to be a blast to do.

PAT: *I have to bring this up. The longest to complete, single issue of anything I could ever think of. . . .*

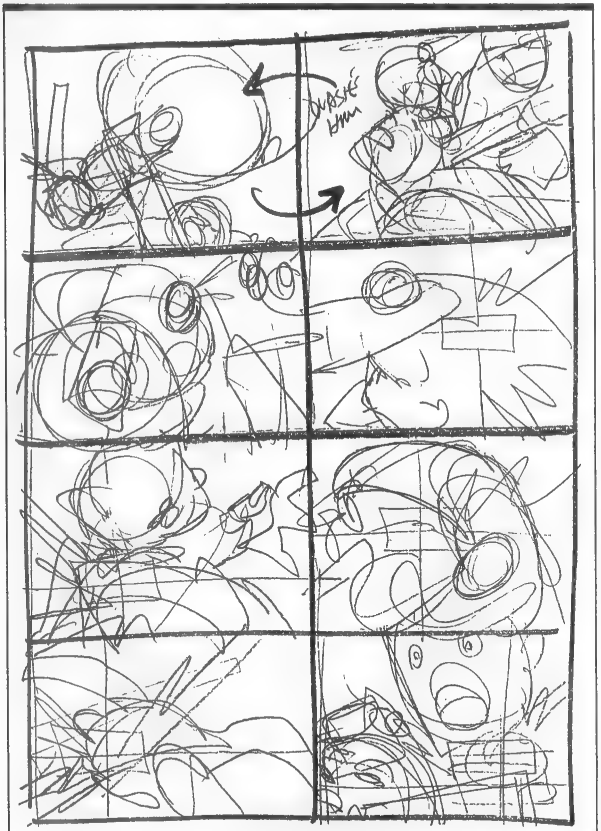
WALT: *(Laughter.)* You're talking about the SUPERMAN ANNUAL. Your statement isn't entirely true. I think I finished this faster than **Neal Adams** finished THE JOKER'S FIVE-WAY REVENGE And **Chris Claremont** and **Michael Golden** are still doing their annual which they began at the time I'd started doing mine. We have to keep the record straight. *(Laughter.)* I'll settle for one of the longest. It was supposed to be the SUPERMAN ANNUAL for 1989 and I finished it up around the end of January. I think it'll be out this summer sometime. I suppose it will be one of these heretofore untold tales of Superman. The story is a stand-alone story but I wrote the script three years ago when I was reading a lot of the SUPERMAN titles and knew what was going on. The fact that Luthor is no longer alive is the biggest glitch which we had thought about going back and changing. It's nice to have it done although I figure **Mike Carlin's** the happiest to see it finished. I took over the FANTASTIC FOUR and couldn't keep up the monthly schedule and finish the SUPERMAN ANNUAL. When I left FF, I went back and finished the SUPERMAN stuff.

PAT: *When you left this stuff and then went back to it, did you look at it differently? Was there a shift in your style?*

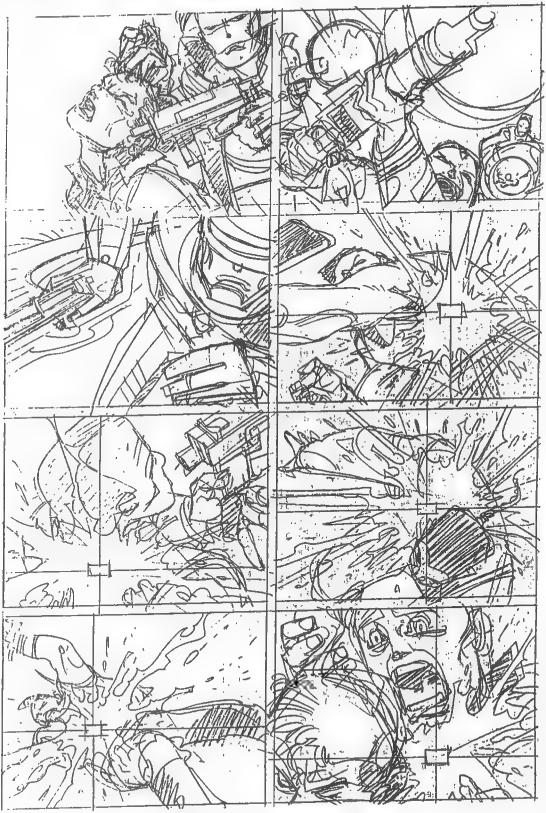
WALT: To an extent. Even though it took me so long to complete the SUPERMAN work I would work on it occasionally over time. I didn't get much done, but I had the entire job thumbnailed, fully scripted, and the first three pages inked with another dozen pencilled at the time I took over the FANTASTIC FOUR. I never really lost touch with the job. I inked a lot of it after my FF

--MAKE NO MISTAKES--
--EVERYTHING IS IN PERIL--
--PREPARE THE TERMINATORS--
--IT IS THEIR LAST CHANCE.
IT IS THEIR ONLY CHANCE.
INITIATE TIME DISPLACEMENT
IT IS THEIR ONLY CHANCE.

"I think one of the things I was pretty good with



early on was the storytelling aspect of comics."



"Hey, it's not a photograph, it's a simulation."

assignment. The only major changes would be that I think I draw better now than I did three years ago. Years and years ago I was working on a **Robert E. Howard** adaptation for Marvel and I did the pencil art, and then for reasons that are no longer clear to me — since it happened so long ago — the story never got published. I'm talking about 1975. I would find that job difficult to go back on without redoing it. The layouts aren't that bad; I still look at them from time to time. The finishes would be very different because of the way I work today. The pages that are in pencil I could probably work over.

PAT: *Have you found that over the years your style changes have been in the way you finish things as opposed to the way you look at the basics of storytelling and layout?*

WALT: A lot of the changes are the changes of practice. After you do this for a while your hand becomes more co-ordinated with the mind and the mind becomes more coordinated with the eye. A lot of that comes from the inks. I think one of the things I was pretty good with early on was the storytelling aspect of comics. I think that was pretty good before I could even draw well. The funny thing about comics that I appreciate is that there are so many things you have to solve: composition, page design, costume, perspective — you can be good at some of it and lousy at others and still do a good comic. I think the major change in what I do is that I think I'm better at most of the things. The work I've done over the years has changed because I've been interested in having it change. Some of the changes stem from the outgrowth of the different jobs I've done. Most of the changes come from my drawing rather than my storytelling.

PAT: *You also mentioned some work for Comico.*

WALT: I'm doing six covers for Comico's ELEMENTALS book. I believe it may be a limited special series for ELEMENTALS but I'm not sure. I've seen ads using the first cover I've done and I think it's going to be foil-embossed or something which will, believe it or not be a first for me. I'm not connected with the stories at all; I'm just doing covers. What they did was send me the references and a cover sketch and then I took it from there.

PAT: *Are there any special problems that crop up when you're dealing with books or characters that you're not especially familiar with?*

WALT: The main problem is getting a decent reference. And this is true for any company when you're working with a character you're unfamiliar with. It's especially critical on covers. What happens is you start twisting characters around on covers and then you realize all of your references are from the front. That kind of thing happens to everybody. Either you make it up if you can or you ask for better references. On books that I draw regularly my approach changes over time. For the stuff like the covers I'm doing for Jim or for the ELEMENTALS I just draw it and don't analyze it to the degree I would on a regular book I was drawing.

PAT: *It reminds me of when I was doing fan art for fanzines. I always wondered how you draw the webbing under Spider-Man's arms from the side.*

WALT: And the answer, of course, is, you leave it out. *(Laughter.)*

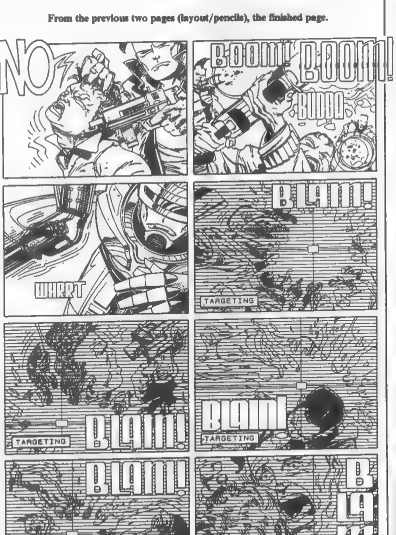
PAT: *I remember looking at the Ditko stuff and that's exactly what he did.*

WALT: Hey boys and girls, it's not a photograph! It's an incredible simulation, it's a drawing. You can leave something out if you can't figure it out. A time-honored solution.

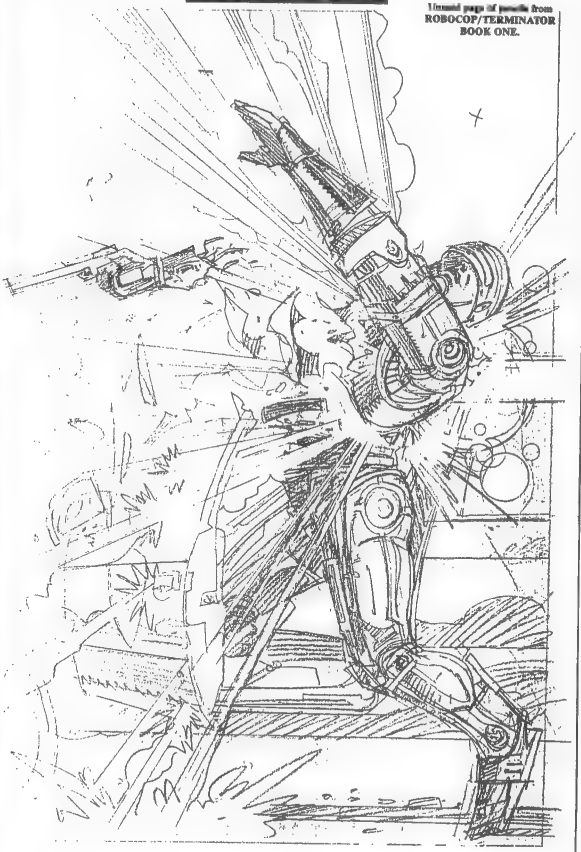
PAT: *Any other work that you have coming up for DC?*

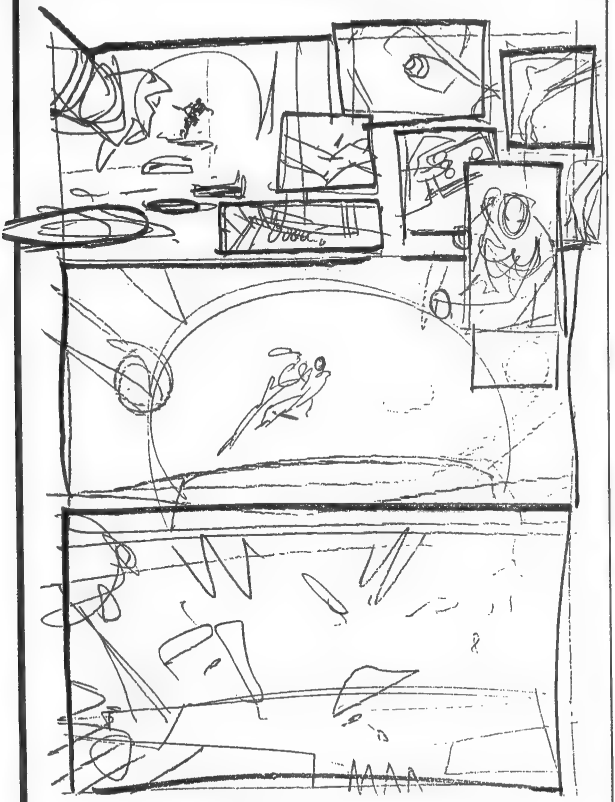
WALT: Actually, now that you mention it, I did pencil and ink ten pages for DC's ARMAGEDDON INFERNO. **John**

From the previous two pages (layout/pencils), the finished page.



Unused page of panels from ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR BOOK ONE.





This page is made up of a total of eleven panels . . .

. . . here we are able to see just how Walt designed the page: layout to pencils.

Pencils from a splash page from Marvel's black and white THE RAMPAGING HULK (later inked and washed by Alcala).

"I went for Orion and Enemy Ace. I'm not writing it."

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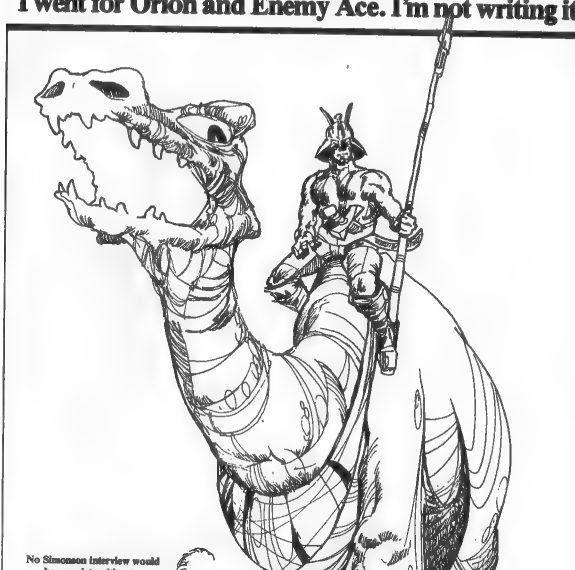

No Simonson interview would be complete without a dinosaur! And this is a very early one, from August 14, 1971. Many influences can be detected in this drawing — among them, Winsor "GERTIE THE DINOSAUR/LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND" McCay.

Ostrander called up and asked me about this and wanted to know who I wanted to draw. I went for Orion and Enemy Ace. After all, I'm not writing it. I don't have to solve the problem of how the hell to get these guys together.

PAT: *To come full circle with this interview, I'd like to discuss your comments that you've worked for more companies in the past nine months than you have in your entire career. Do you find the life of freelancer more hectic as compared to working for a single company at a time?*

WALT: It requires more thought. When you're doing a regular monthly book you don't have to think about what your next job is going to be. You can concentrate on the plots or getting the inking done. The trade off is I now have a greater freedom over what I can do. At the same time it requires more work because I have to get contracts squared away and such. I don't like paperwork. I once didn't apply to an art school because I got tired of filling out the applications. It's actually fun taking bits and pieces of

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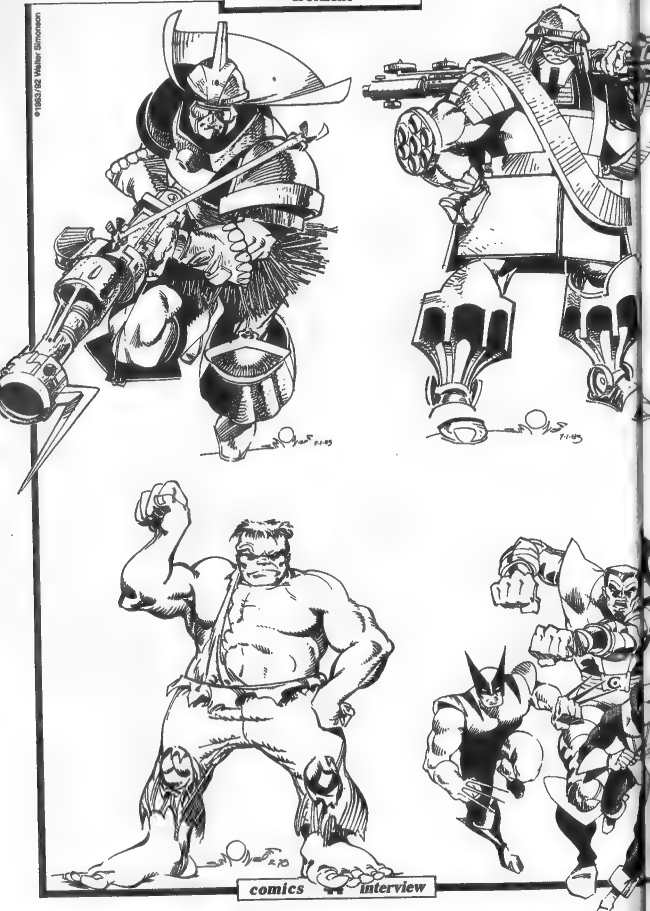

Clockwise: Two character drawings from Walt's STARSLAMMERS (Sphere and Little Ethon), promotional cover, and art of Apocalypse, two cover pieces for a defunct British zine (X-Men and Hulk).

Here's the cover sketch for DC Comics' THE ART OF WALTER SIMONSON.

"I'd like to do a STARSLAMMERS graphic novel."

©1978'92 Walter Simonson

Little (no pun!) seen gem from 1976. Walt used duo-tone with this stylish piece that saw print in one of the more "slick" fanzines.

different jobs and drawing different characters. One of the things I do miss from the monthly grind is the kind of feedback you get from the fans because you get a lot of feedback on the monthly stuff; they know how to find you. When you're hopping around you don't have that fan connection and I do miss that aspect of it. Hopefully we'll get lots of letters on the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR book. Who knows?

PAT: *What would it take to entice you back onto a regular monthly assignment be it at Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, Valiant, whatever?*

WALT: I suppose if they would walk up to me and say, "Walt, here's a million dollars." *(Laughter.)* I don't think there's a company that could entice me into a project if I wasn't interested in doing it in the first place. I think that right now I'm doing stuff that I choose to do. What I'd like to do as I get towards the end of the ROBOCOP/TERMINATOR work is put together a series of proposals for some projects I'd like to do, including a STARSLAMMERS graphic novel or something of that sort. I think I would rather go in that direction, at least for a little while. I've done a lot of characters at Marvel and DC and I do like monthly series work because it regulates your work and every month you've accomplished something. The type of work I'm doing leads to a lot of goofing off. You might promise to get a cover done after you do this, that or the other thing -- and then you're going berserk trying to get a cover finished. The monthly grind does have its advantages: it makes you work, it makes you think. By not doing a monthly book I'm looking forward to the freedom to try some stuff that I want to do. This is the first step in that direction.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

RESPECTS HACKS AS MUCH AS WRITERS & ARTISTS

Dear COMICS INTERVIEWers:

Your recent interview, "Lo! The Letterhacks!" (COMICS INTERVIEW #107) represented a new and extremely interesting twist, another dimension to the comics industry: those tireless, loquacious letterhacks. I have had my own interesting experiences with letterhacks

I had always been an avid reader of letter columns since I began reading comics in the 1960s. The authors (the term letterhack had not yet been coined) would recall recently past issues, often relating historically to even earlier issues, providing along the way new insights and fond recollections. Letters of comment, then, added to the joy of reading comics.

I stopped reading comics for more than a decade, returning in the late 1980s. I eased back in, but resumed with more fervor than before the perusal of letter columns. You see, after a long hiatus, the letter columns served to help fill in the years between titles.

Names like **Uncle Elvis, Lon Wolf,** and **Melissa Page** became as familiar to me as **Frank Miller, John Byrne,** and **George Perez** — and just as important.

Shifting through the largely unfamiliar new ground that comics had grown to cover since the early 1970s — a surge in independent titles, mature themes, new talent — I began to home in on letter columns which provided an effective review, often an inspired analysis of a particular title. I grew quickly to respect the hacks as much as I did the comic writers and artists. To see names like **Sperling, Holden, Lucas,** and **Bourne** in a letter column was a sure signal that the comic deserved further examination.

I discovered titles like FIRESTORM, L.E.G.I.O.N., and DARK HORSE PRESENTS through this means — following the hacks. And it was the motivator behind my own letter writing today.

I have gained much from this intelligent, highly motivated assembly of individuals calling themselves letterhacks: insights, enjoyment, and more recently, friendships. I try now as a letter writer to give back a little of what I have gained in abundance from this group.

Thanks, then, for your recognition of these special people I have come to admire.

Jan C. Childress
82 Pierrepont Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

WATCH THOSE SUPERLATIVES!

Dear DAK;

I have a lamentable habit, whenever someone claims to be "first" or "most" or any other superlative that lends itself to objective measurement, to say "Oh, yeah?" So when I was typesetting the **Walter Koenig** interview, and came to where he says he thinks he's the only person to appear in comic books as three different characters, I immediately started thinking of counter-examples. And I assure you, it was not at all a difficult task.

John Wayne, Dick Powell and **Buster Crabbe** have all had their own comic-book *series*, in which they appeared as a different character each issue. Each of them also appeared in movie adaptations from Dell and, in Wayne's case, Gold Key.

Jackie Gleason had *two* series — and although the one from DC showed him only in the role of Ralph Kramden, his St. John series depicted him as Reginald Van Gleason III, The Poor Soul and no doubt a couple of others. In addition, he appeared as Kramden in a couple of series of HONEYMOONERS adaptations in the 1980s.

I recall a thinly-disguised **Danny Kaye**

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LAST WORD

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appearing in a 1970s DC comic; and Kaye also appeared in numerous movie adaptations from various publishers.

Disney regulars **Tim Considine** and **Kevin Corcoran** must each have appeared as dozens of different characters in movie adaptations all over the world (tho in **Corcoran's** case most of them were named "Moochie"). In fact, there are probably dozens of actors who have appeared as three or more characters in movie and TV adaptations from Dell, Gold Key, DC, Fawcett, Charlton, etc.

So, interviewees, watch those superlatives! Your typographer is watching.

By the way, here's a trivia question. Let's turn it around. Which *character* has been depicted in comics by the most *actors*? My guess is Tarzan. Dell and Gold Key photo covers showed **Weissmuller, Barker, Ely** and probably several other actors in that role. (Ely, of course, also played Doc Savage and . . . but we've already established that **Koenig's** distinction is far from unique.)

Don Markstein
P.O. Box 17298
Phoenix, AZ 85011

OVERLITZED MUSICAL TASTES?

Dear Dave,

If'n you don't get your head outta Blue Oyster Cult so much and start listening to a little **Garth Brooks** and **Dwight Yoakam,** I am gonna publicly disown ya! (And your little dog Toto, too.) (And no, that isn't another *band* we're talking about!) As the **Bellamy Brothers** put it, **"We had Sympathy for the Devil and the Rolling Stones /** Then we got a little older, we found **Haggard** and **Jones . . ."** Getting into modern country would be a positive detox treatment for overblitzed musical tastes, and as a good "bridge," I recommend Dwight's "Long White Cadillac." That and Lyle Lovett's "Friend of the Devil" track on DEADICATED (a **Grateful Dead** tribute album) oughtta make you a believer. Next thing ya know, you'll have disavowed those three Blue Oysterly DEFENDERS you wrote, and started writing stories based on songs by **Hank Jr., Travis Tritt,** and **K.T. Oslin.**

Maybe in a comic called NASHVILLE KNIGHTS. Now wouldn't that be interesting?

X-MEN ON TV!

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Lou Mougin
1406 Fourth St.
Graham, TX 76046

*Actually, Lou, "never say never" (as they say). It might could happen, but don't hold your breath. I've been listening to a little classical and a lot of opera, lately — so let me toss a couple suggestions your way as an antidote to country. Delibe's "Lakmé" and Puccini's "La Boheme" (both of which can be found on a CD titled THE MOVIES GO TO THE OPERA, which serves as a starter sampler), or try Kiri Te Kanowa's VERDI & PUCCINI. Johann Strauss (the original) as performed by the Vienna Opera Orchestra on a CD of the same name is a longtime favorite, conjuring up old Austria as it does. Pick up SOLARIS by Patrick Bernhards for some New Age relaxation therapy to go along with your Yoga (you are practicing your Yoga, now, Lou, aren't you?). And just to show I can be retro, look around the bargain bins for an old album by The Who now on CD, called A QUICK ONE/HAPPY JACK, that showcases some incredible early drumming by Keith Moon. There, that should keep you busy for a while. *Sheesh!* Modern country, indeed, Lou!*

— DAK

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (404) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

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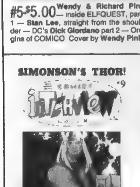

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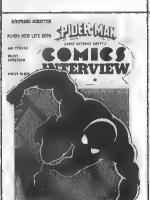

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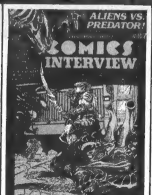

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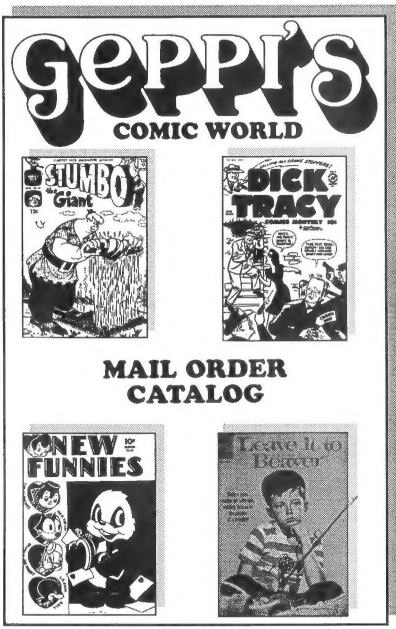

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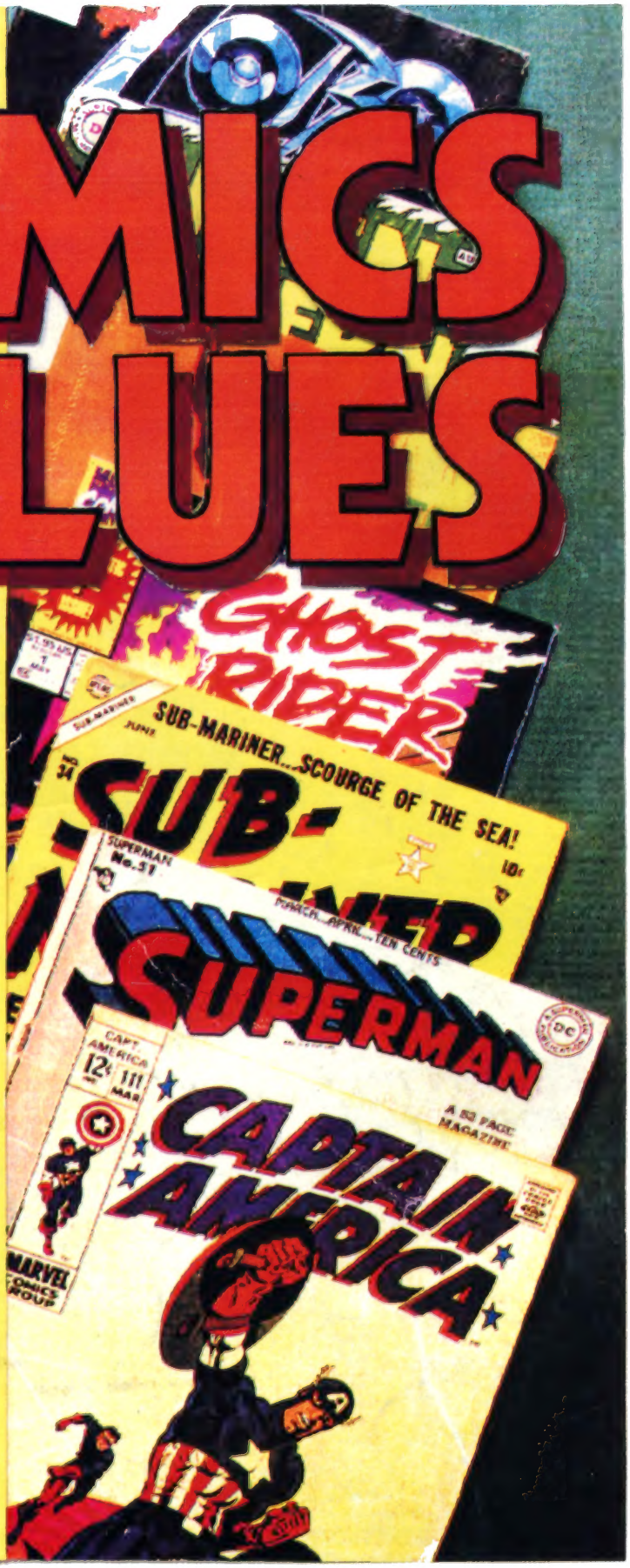

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